General Audiences

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Gen

Project Hail Mary - Andy Weir
Project Hail Mary (2026)

Ryland Grace & Rocky

Ryland Grace
Rocky (Project Hail Mary)

Platonic Cuddling
Platonic Soulmates
Fluff
Cuddling & Snuggling
Ryland Grace & Rocky are Best Friends
Ryland Grace Needs a Hug
Hair
Animals
Journey to Erid (Project Hail Mary)
English ← Previous Work Part 4 of Platonic cuddling Next Work →

'til touchdown brings me 'round again

Likelightinglass

Summary:

In which Grace and Rocky discuss pets, and Grace learns about something new to look forward to on Erid.

Notes:

Thank you to everyone who gave me wonderful suggestions in the comments of the last fic! For all the fans of hair play, theres some nice descriptions I hope. Part of the plot here inspired by a conversation with Fistelie, and an absurd idea I had that I just had to write.

Hope you enjoy!

(See the end of the work for more notes (#work_endnotes) and other works inspired by this one (#children) .)

Rocky is busy working on something and I am *bored*. And restless. On the ISS they have treadmills and whatever for the astronauts right? Why didn't they include something like that here so I don't have to literally bounce off the walls. Maybe I'll ask Rocky to install a hamster wheel in my Humantopia (working title) on Erid.

The journey to Erid is…listen I don't want to complain because it's not like I *want* to have to fix this ship or do revolutionary science that billions of people depend on or two planets die, or almost get killed or anything. But it is, for lack of a better adjective, boring.

I'm sat on the floor of the lab tossing a ball up in the air and then catching it. For variety, I try with my right hand, my left hand, in front of me, behind me, and then side to side. Rocky is intensely focused on operating some kind of gadget

with two hands and punching away notes in one of his journals with another. I would think the noise I'm making with the ball would distract him, but it isn't.

So I switch to bouncing the ball directly off the walls above his tunnel instead, hoping to provoke a reaction. That's got to be loud and annoying enough.

Still nothing! “Talk to meeeee,” I whine. “I'm bored.”

“You scientist. Do science work.”

“I've got years of Taumoeba and human nutrition based research ahead of me. I've got to save some discoveries to look forward to.”

“Clean up lab”.

I consider. “No.”

“Work on research papers.”

“I have been. Taking a break now, though, there's only so long I can type and edit and reread without going crazy.”

“All humans go crazy this easily, or just Grace?”

“Ha ha. All humans. I'm actually a perfectly average representative of humanity and everything I do is totally normal by human standards,” I say. What's he going to do? Check?

He doesn’t dignify that with a response.

“Go outside then.”

Huh? “Hey! I didn't think I was being so annoying that you want me to throw myself out the airlock!” That was a mean thing for him to say.

“No! Turn off engines, get in EVA suit, float outside and look at space. Get exercise. Get calm.”

Hmm. “That's. Not a bad idea, actually.”

“Obvious. Rocky does not have bad ideas.”

“Will you be okay in zero G for a bit?”

He just waves dismissively. *“Will be fine. Go have ‘a moment’,”* he says.

So I do. I batten down the few things that need it and cut the engines. Then I suit up, and drift outside, firmly tethered to the airlock.

And I take a moment, a lot of moments, and just look up in perfect silence at the stars.

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When I come in, I feel different. Better, I think. But smaller too, and quieter.

After starting the engines up again and readjusting our course (we lost barely any time, I'm not worried), I make my way back down to the lab.

I look at Rocky for a bit, just watching him work. Thinking about how he must know me better than anyone on Earth ever did. I move to sit cross legged on the floor, leaning against the barrier, just thinking. About how big the universe is. About being so far from home. About the impossibility of us finding each other, two specks of dust in the endless sea of space.

About how I'm very very very glad that we did.

He's still fiddling with his thingamabob, but I feel his attention drift towards me. Without words, he walks a few feet away to the flexible barrier and waits expectantly.

“You're busy,” I say, but move along with him anyway, settling close to the thin barrier and feeling its warmth.

“Have five hands,” he says easily. *“Grace can have one.”*

I smile, snuggling into the warm blanket of xenonite. “Will you play with my hair for a while?” I ask.

I close my eyes, and feel the pleasant heaviness of his hand on the crown of my head. I have no idea how he manages to maintain such gentleness with me. You'd think one of these days he'd accidentally use all his strength and knock me into next week, but no. Never. He's always handled me with so much care, it almost hurts to think about.

He opens his claws, three points of pressure dragging down over my scalp, then tangling in the strands of hair, tugging just enough to pleasantly prickle as he drags his hand down to the ends. He's been a very quick study in how to relax me.

I just sink into the sensation of it, the almost fabric feel of the membrane reminds me of a towel rubbing through my hair after a shower, drying the strands and leaving it impossibly disheveled.

He alternates between starting at the top of my head and down through my hair and to my neck; and then at either side, rubbing at my temples with that impossible gentleness before scraping his claws down behind the curve of my ears, scratching at where my earlobe meets my neck and giving my shoulders a squeeze before tracing back up.

“You are so good at this,” I say, almost slurring with relaxation. My head is buzzing with an incredibly pleasant tingling sensation that starts at my forehead and sends an electric static up and over my head and down my back. “How are you so good at this?”

“I am very smart. Study materials and technology on Erid, learn to fix. Study spaceship, fix. Study my human. Fix.”

“Consider me fixed,” I say with a laugh. I feel awesome, and while I know there's plenty of potentially crazy making situations ahead of me, at least I know this will help. That Rocky will help.

He just hums in a smug acknowledgement.

“Hey, are you actually getting anything out of this? Like, physically? Or is it all one sided?” I feel a little guilty sometimes that it's a chore for him, even though he said it wasn't. That I'm not a burden. (That I'm *precious precious precious*, I remember as often as possible).

He thinks for a moment. *“I enjoy. Is like…sometimes when working or concentrating Eridians will tap rhythm with one arm to help focus. Or when just thinking, to relax or calm down. When touching you, can hear your heartbeat, your breathing. If I relax you, is steady and calm. Enjoyable rhythm, pleasant sensation for me. Can feel and hear at same time when you make happy sounds. Is nice,”* he finishes with a shrug.

An absurd realization hits me, and I snort a laugh. “I'm like your cat. My ‘purring’ is calming to you.” The idea is incredibly funny to me. When I plop myself down in front of him some days and basically yowl to demand pets while he works, is that the human equivalent of a cat walking across your keyboard?

“New word, what is meaning, question?”

“Cat,” I say. “It’s an animal on Earth, one of a few different domesticated creatures humans keep around as friends.”

“And what makes you similar to animal friend, question?”

“Humans like to stroke animals' fur to show them affection, and the animals like it too. It's relaxing and releases oxytocin. Improves mood.”

“You have this creature on Earth question?”

“I didn't, but Linda- my, uh, brief former mate? -did. He moved in with me when she did. A fat orange cat named Skittles. He would jump up in my lap and howl in my face until I pet him. And if I stopped he'd bite me.”

Rocky laughs. *“You have not yet attempted to bite me.”*

“Mmm. Well that's just because you don't stop before I want you to.” I snap my teeth for emphasis. He's rhythmically twisting the longish strands now, almost into a loose braid, but its not long enough yet to hold. Still feels very nice.

“We have animal on Erid some children like to keep and care for. Parents allow to teach responsibility.” He tells me the name in a new set of chords.

“What do they look like?”

“Similar to the Earth animal from one of your movies. But much smaller. And much less frightening.”

Frightening? “What movie?” I sit up to look at him, curious.

“One with man who makes zoo, animals get loose. Eat humans. Erid animal look like the ones that scare the children, but Erid animal is friendly.”

“Do you…do you mean *Jurassic Park*!?

“Yes, that one.”

I just stare. “I need you to draw me a picture or make a model of this animal now. Like, literally right now.”

He is clearly confused, but I am potentially finding out my favorite dinosaur exists on the alien planet I'm en route to. He wanders off to grab his little model making kit and some metal. I'm pressing my face against the xenonite like a lunatic as, sure enough, a rocky little velociraptor appears in his hands.

“This. They are about…half the size of my arm? They easy to care for. Like to jump around.”

“Velociraptor!” I say with what can best be described as a shriek. “You have tiny, friendly velociraptors?” “Can I –” I cut myself off. What? Have one? Would that even work in Human Park (new working title)?

“You want velociraptor as pet on Erid, question?”

You know what, Stratt, I'm not even a little bit mad anymore. Forget saving the planet and making a best friend and finding new and beautiful scientific wonders. If I knew I could have a tiny velociraptor pet, I'd have strapped myself into that rocket with no complaints. Eh. I mean that's probably an exaggeration but six year old Ryland is fully freaking out right now so it's hard to think straight.

“Yes! Yes yes yes! Is that possible?”

“Can do this. They don't need very much space. Could make habitat for them go between human area and Erid area. Gloves and membrane so you could handle. Would not be too heavy for you to hold them.”

The model is still hot from the airlock but I don't care that its almost burning my hands. This is so cool!

I see Rocky add a few lines to one of his notebooks and then put it to the side. He takes a lot of notes lately. Maybe he's working on his memoir of dealing with the crazy human.

“Next movie night we are watching the sequels,” I say decisively. “I want to tell you all about my other favorite dinosaurs.”

“How have multiple favorites, question?”

“Earth thing. Ask any human kid and they will have at least three favorite dinosaurs, and a ranking order. My third favorite is a pterodactyl. They fly. They're in the third movie.”

He just shakes his carapace. *“Humans strange,”* he says with a wave. *“Fine, we watch. You show me which creature was child Grace's seventeenth favorite.”*

I just snicker, too thrilled to care about his snark. “Alright, movie time!”

Notes:

Try and tell me Ryland Grace wasn't a dinosaur kid. I'm doing my part to give him his happiest epilogue life haha.

Thank you for reading!

Series this work belongs to:

- ← Previous Work (http://archiveofourown.org/works/82068196) Part 4 of Platonic cuddling (http://archiveofourown.org/series/5891781) Next Work → (http://archiveofourown.org/works/83604846)

Works inspired by this one:

- [Podfic] 'til touchdown brings me 'round again (https://archiveofourown.org/works/83700636) by Flowerparrish Pods (Flowerparrish) (http://archiveofourown.org/users/Flowerparrish/pseuds/Flowerparrish%20Pods)

Close (#)